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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0277  
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0050  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0345  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3780  
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 2320  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 8225  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 2083  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0627  
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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: DISMANTLED TERRORIST NETWORK ILLICITS SHOCK, BUT NOT  
SURPRISE IN CASABLANCA

REF: RABAT 00171

¶1. (C) Summary: Casablancans reacted to the news of the discovery of an extensive terrorist network in Morocco with shock, but not surprise. Casablancans were stunned that seemingly ordinary professionals were involved, and that large weapons caches were found. At the same time, volatile events in the Middle East and on-going dissatisfaction with Morocco's political and economic situation make the existence of such a network unsurprising. Still, many Casablancans feel unease setting in as the GOM faces an apparently determined radical foe. End Summary.

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SHOCK AT TYPE OF PEOPLE, WEAPONS  
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¶2. (SBU) In the wake of the Government of Morocco's (GOM) announcement on February 20 that authorities dismantled an extensive terrorist network led by Moroccan-Belgian Abdelkader Belliraj, Casablancans expressed shock at two main elements of the case. First, they were stunned by the type of people implicated. In general, Casablancans found it hard to believe that those involved were seemingly ordinary professionals such as teachers, pharmacists and government employees. One Consulate staff member said that a friend went to engineering school with one of the men arrested, whom the friend described as quiet and anti-Islamist as a student. Like others, he struggled to understand what might make such a person turn to extremism, if that was indeed what happened.

¶3. (SBU) Though some theorize that poverty breeds terrorism, the relatively high social status of most of the Belliraj network members led several Casablancans to dismiss this argument once and for all. According to one woman, terrorists used to be "people from poor areas who didn't have enough money to eat. Now, it's a completely different story." As another individual put it, "We have poor people and we will always have poor people. That doesn't make them want to kill themselves."

¶4. (SBU) Casablancans were also shocked at the type and quantity of weapons the terrorist cell had amassed. Many mentioned photos they had seen of a cache of Kalashnikovs, automatic pistols and other arms. While rumors circulate that the dismantling of such an extensive terrorist network is, at least in part, a government ploy

to discredit Morocco's Islamist elements, many feel that the details revealed about the individuals involved and the weapons found provide evidence that the story is true.

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...BUT NOT SURPRISE  
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¶5. (C) While Casablancans expressed shock at the news of a large and well-financed terrorist network in Morocco, many were not surprised. According to one teacher, arrested members of the newly-banned political party Al Badil Al Hadari (Civilized Alternative) may have been trying to replicate parties in other parts of the Middle East that maintain armed wings (for example, Hamas and Hezbollah). "It's the regional and international context that creates this," he said. Others echoed the view that the terrorist threat has become a fixture, particularly over the past several years in Morocco. Summing up the situation, a nanny said she was not surprised by recent events since, "terrorism may never be finished."

¶6. (C) Although a terrorist network of the kind unveiled last week is a new phenomenon in Morocco, several Casablancans noted that widespread dissatisfaction with the current political and economic situation also make it unsurprising. As one individual pointed out, low participation in the September 2007 parliamentary elections has already highlighted citizens' loss of confidence in the democratic game. Even parliamentarian Fouad Ali El-Himma and his effort to form the All Democrats Movement are viewed as "old wine in new bottles" -another puppet to do the regime's bidding. Such discontent with both the current state of affairs and the solutions on offer are seen as contributing to extremism.

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UNEASE SETS IN  
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¶7. (SBU) Along with the discovery of the Belliraj network comes a feeling of unease among Casablancans. One woman said that while watching TV a few nights ago, she heard a loud noise and exchanged worried looks with her husband as they waited for sirens. None came, but her pounding heart made her realize that she, like the state, was on high alert. Others expressed anger and disbelief that their compatriots willfully sought to destabilize the country, particularly given the positive efforts to improve it.

¶8. (C) Comment: Recent meetings in Casablanca with various reformers and key influencers make clear that a dedicated and forward-thinking elite is working hard with the government and the King to steady Morocco on the path to growth and democracy. The discovery of the Belliraj terrorist network reveals that the GOM and reform-minded citizens face not only challenges such as lack of capacity or political will, but a graver foe that wants to oust this cadre of people and is willing to fight Morocco's moderate leanings with extremism. Even for Casablancans, who have experienced terrorism first-hand in the last five years, the latest series of events make this point in a very dramatic way. End Comment.

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